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CBC Newsletter

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For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

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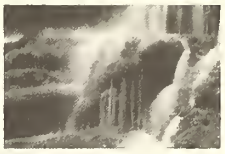

SPRINGTIME ON THE ESCARPMENT!

Marion Clark

The Blue Ridge, the front range of the Appalachian Mountains from Pennsylvania to Georgia, generally runs northeast to southwest. However, near the South Carolina state line it abruptly becomes almost east-west to the tri-state corner (Ellicott's Rock), creating a dramatic escarpment that the Cherokees called the "Blue Wall". This is a magical place for plants and animals, due in part to the moist environment created in these southern mountains. Precipitation coming up from the Gulf of Mexico collides with these scarps and rain and snow are dumped onto the front face of the Blue Ridge in South Carolina. The average annual precipitation here is over 80 inches, and the record over 100 inches - a temperate rainforest!

Couple abundant precipitation with the elevation along the escarpment - 30 mountains of more than 3,000 feet, over 2,000 feet above the surrounding lowlands - and you have a section of the Blue Ridge Province that is unique to the state. While South Carolina is ranked fortieth of the states in size, it rates sixth in biodiversity thanks in part to three distinct life zones within a relatively small area. Conditions on the Blue Ridge are much more like the Middle Atlantic States or the Ohio River Valley than the Southeast. Birds such as the Peregrine Falcon, Ruffed Grouse, Common Raven and Dark-eyed Junco are at home here year round, and at least 33 species of warblers, including especially Swainson's Warbler, use the area.

While the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment embraces only about 600 square miles in South Carolina, roughly one-half of that is protected through national forest, seven state parks, natural heritage preserves, the Nature Conservancy, local land trusts, and two immense municipal watersheds. Names like the Chattooga River, Walhalla Trout Hatchery, the Jocassee Gorges, Lakes Jocassee and Keowee, Sassafras Mountain, Table Rock and the Stool, Caesar's Head, Hogback Mountain and the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway (SC 11) come to mind as prime birding and nature observation sites in the area.

The university town of Clemson perhaps has the best accommodations for hosting the Spring meeting of the Carolina Bird Club (CBC), which is scheduled for May 1-3, 2009. And so it is here, about 10 miles north of I-85, that we will gather to celebrate the bounty of Spring migration in the SC uplands. Headquarters will be the Ramada Inn, which will be familiar to those who attended the last CBC meeting in Clemson. We will have field trips to a few sites in the foothills (1,000-1,200 feet), like the grasslands and ponds of Dobbins Farm, but most will be in the mountains on both sides of the state line. A bonus trip to Stecoah Gap (Graham County, NC) on Sunday, May 3 is scheduled as well. Look for details, field trip information and registration forms in the next "Newsletter".

Remember: When it's springtime on the Escarpment, it's Spring meeting time for the Carolina Bird Club. See you there!

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Wings Over Water Festival Participants Enjoy the Outer Banks

Steve Shultz

Bodie Island Lighthouse

The 12th annual Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival was held in coastal eastern North Carolina from November 4-9, 2008. Participants from the Carolinas and beyond enjoyed a diverse array of field trips, social events, and entertainment designed to highlight the "wild" side of the northern coast's tidewater region.

As can be the case in early November, weather was a bit of a challenge, with a nor'easter depositing up to eight inches of rain along the Outer Banks early in the week. By the weekend conditions improved significantly, and the standing water left behind from the storm attracted a number of shorebirds to areas that one might not normally consider shorebird hot spots… like parking lots.

Brewer's Blackbird at Pea Island

The lot at Oregon Inlet turned into a de facto shorebird workshop when dozens of Dunlin, plovers, Sandlerling, dowitchers (including a few Long-billed), and yellowlegs set up shop in a shallow pool covering a number of parking spots. The nearby Oregon Inlet Marina parking lot also hosted a number of birds, including one of three Hudsonian Godwits enjoyed by field trip participants, and a dark ibis that some feel may have been a White-faced. If accepted by the NC Records Committee, this bird would represent one of only a handful of records of this primarily western species. A bit farther south in the Pea Island area, ocean overwash and standing storm water allowed folks traveling on NC Highway 12 to spot shorebirds feeding along the road shoulders while they dodged expansive puddles and blowing sand. While ducks were a bit scare on the refuge, a couple of Eurasian Wigeon and three Brant entertained birders on South Pond field trips. Other uncommon finds included reports of Snow Buntings along the coast and at Alligator River NWR, a small number of Cave Swallows, Parasitic Jaeger at Rodanthe, and a male Brewer's Blackbird that could conveniently be viewed in the same area as another of the Hudsonian Godwits.

Again this year the Carolina Bird Club acted as a festival co-sponsor. CBC member John Ennis arranged for selection and recruitment of the festival's keynote speaker, Pete Dunne. A well-known birder, author, Vice President of the NJ Audubon Society, and director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, Dunne presented two seminars on the "Art of Pishing", presented the Friday evening keynote speech "Twenty-five Things That Changed Birding", and provided an opportunity for a lucky group of birders to spend a day in the field with him exploring the Outer Banks. The keynote speech provided an overview of the most significant changes to birding over the past thirty years, noting events like the creation of the interstate highway system (so folks could get to the birds!), the introduction of the first birder-friendly binoculars and spotting scopes (so folks could see the birds!), and of course the Internet (so folks could find out where to find the birds!)

Sound like fun? Look for the next WOW Festival in November 2009, hope to see you there!

Black Bear at Alligator River NWR

Meet Your Executive Committee: Marion Clark

This is the first in an occasional series intended to provide a more personal look at the folks who volunteer for Executive Committee (EC) positions for the Carolina Bird Club. EC members serve various roles for the Club, but the one thing all have in common is a love of birds and willingness to volunteer time and effort. EC members help to ensure that the organization remains true to its charter and by-laws, and try and provide members with the best services and opportunities possible.

Today we meet with Marion Clark, South Carolina Vice-President. The Club seats three Vice-Presidents, one from Eastern North Carolina, one from Western North Carolina, and one from South Carolina, and Vice-Presidents serve single three-year terms. Marion is nearing the end of his three-year term that began in 2006 and will end later this year.

Newsletter: What is the most enjoyable part of being on the Executive Committee?
Marion: It is thrilling to sit with a group so totally concerned about bird conservation and birding opportunities for fellow members.

Newsletter: What is your favorite species of bird that breeds in the Carolinas?
Marion: Wood Thrush… the name of our 4-acre woodlot/home place is "Thrushwood"!

Newsletter: Please describe your favorite birding moment.
Marion: I agree with Zorba the Greek (Anthony Quinn in the movie by the same title): "It's a great sin to have favorites!" Having said that and having to choose, I have to say it was my first SIGHTING of a Swainson's Warbler on Hogback Mountain, SC, while leading a CBC field trip during the last Hendersonville meeting. This had been my nemesis bird for a very long time, even though having spent considerable time in the right habitat and hearing it on occasions too numerous to count.

Newsletter: What is your favorite birding field guide?
Marion: Peterson, without question. I got my first Peterson book as an Easter gift from my parents in 1952, and it effectively launched my serious birdwatching. I have the second and fourth editions and look forward to getting the Centennial Edition (Eastern and Western North America) just published by Houghton Mifflin.

Newsletter: What is your favorite birding/natural history book (not including field guides)?
Marion: Marcus Simpson's Birds *of the Blue Ridge Mountains* because this is my favorite province in which to bird.

Newsletter: Do you keep birding lists? If so, how many?
Marion: I keep a North American list, a South Carolina list, and a yard list.

Newsletter: What is your favorite birding location in the Carolinas?
Marion: Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area in northern Greenville County, SC. The Wilderness Area is comprised of Caesar's Head and Jones Gap State Parks as well as three Heritage Trust Preserves that total 11,000 acres. I have been a volunteer back country ranger/nature interpreter there for 20 years.

Newsletter: What is your favorite birding location outside of the Carolinas?
Marion: Southeastern Arizona

Newsletter: What advice would you have for a young birder just getting started in the hobby?
Marion: Three things. Get out in the field, get out in the field, and get out in the field!

Newsletter: What species tops your list of 'most wanted'?
Marion: Bachman's Sparrow, for the same reasons cited in the last sentence of the 'favorite birding moment' question above. To add insult to injury in not having seen this bird, I am a Lutheran pastor, same as the sparrow's namesake John Bachman, who also founded my college, my seminary, and my Synod. It's not fair!

Newsletter: What do you feel is the most important issue regarding the future of birding?
Marion: Since birding without birds is pretty poor, I think the most important thing affecting birds is habitat degradation at both ends of migration.

Newsletter: Thanks, Marion, for taking to time to share some of your birding experiences with us.

Marion's term as South Carolina Vice-President ends with the election of new officers at the spring 2009 CBC meeting. Please join me in thanking Marion for his efforts over the past three years, and if you know of a sure-fire spot for a Bachman's Sparrow, please extend an invitation to Marion to stop by and fulfill his wish to add this Southeastern specialty to his list!

Member Profile: Matthew Daw

Carolina Bird Club member and Raleigh resident Matthew Daw may only be fifteen years old, but he is already an accomplished birder, winning national recognition for his entries in the American Birding Association's ABA/Leica Young Birder of the Year (YBY) Contest.

The YBY contest is an annual ABA competition sponsored by Leica that strives to educate young birders and provide incentive to develop strong field skills. The competition runs from April to September and consists of four skill areas termed "modules". The four modules are field notebook, illustration, writing, and photography. In order to be considered for the top prize and crowned "Young Birder of the Year", participants must submit entries to compete in at least three of the four categories noted above.

In 2006 Matthew won the big prize, and was named the Young Birder of the Year in the 10-13 year-old category. His win came from placing first in the field notebook area, third in the writing area, and second in illustration. In 2007 Matthew followed up with an honorable mention in the overall contest with third place finishes in the writing, illustration, and photography modules, and honorable mention in the field notebook module.

In 2008 Matthew submitted an essay as part of the American Birding Association's "why I want to be a member of the Leica/ABA Tropicbirds" contest. Four winners, including Matthew, received an invitation to participate in the 2008 World Series of Birding (WSOB), a conservation event sponsored by the New Jersey Audubon Society and the Cape May Bird Observatory. In order to help Matthew attend the WSOB, the Carolina Bird Club's Executive Committee voted to provide Matthew with $500 to cover travel expenses to, during, and from the event.

Matthew flew from Raleigh/Durham to the Philadelphia airport on May 7th and was met by adult leaders who would convey the Leica/ABA Tropicbirds from birding site to birding site during the big event on Saturday, May 10, 2008. For the next two days the group would bond with one another and get to know the habitats and specific sites where they would be counting birds during the WSOB. The competition would run for 24 hours beginning at 12:01 a.m. on the 10th. In order to be ready to identify the first bird, Matthew's group went to bed on Friday before most of the local residents turned on the early evening news. Awaking at 10 p.m. they hit a local all-night diner for sustenance, and then a convenient WAWA gas station for road food, for when one is competing in the WSOB, there is no time for a meal!

The stroke of midnight found the Tropicbirds in a coastal marsh ready to tick off the first bird of the event, which Matthew recalls was either a Clapper Rail or a Marsh Wren. Highlights during the event included a Black Rail flying overhead and identified by its flight call, and a singing Bicknell's Thrush later in the day. After 24 hours the group, which birded only in Cape May County, NJ, tallied 178 species, enough to score third place in the Division C – Grades 9-12 category.

Matthew continues to be excited about birding, though no doubt wishes that driving age would come a little faster, since not much is worse than hearing about a great find nearby, but having to wait for a ride to go and see it! Matthew's favorite birding guide is the *Sibley Guide to Birds*, a copy of which he received as an award from the ABA. His favorite non-field guide birding book is *Kingbird Highway* by Kenn Kaufman, and if given a choice, would prefer to bird in the Big Bend area of Texas.

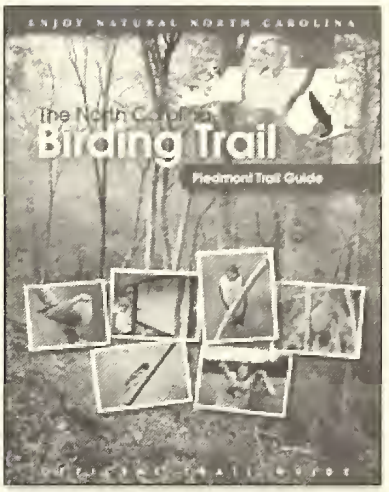
In addition to Matthew's successes participating in the YBY contest, another Carolina Bird Club member, Michael McCloy won honorable mention in the field notebook area and second place in photography in the 2007 contest.

Do you have a young birder in the house, or know someone who does? The ABA/Leica Young Birder of the Year Contest might be a way to channel excitement about birds and birding in a way that serves to hone important field skills. Find more information on the program at http://www.aba.org/yb/yby/index.html.

A Birder's Book Review

Steve Shultz

The North Carolina Birding Trail
Piedmont Trail Guide (2008)
ISBN 978-0807859179
174 pages, spiral bound



The second of three planned North Carolina Birding Trail (NCBT) guides covering the state, the Piedmont guide went on sale this past summer. It follows the Coast guide released in 2007, and precedes the Mountain guide, which is expected to be published later in 2009. The Piedmont Trail Guide covers the area roughly bounded by Interstate 77 in the west to Interstate 95 in the east, including the metropolitan areas of Raleigh-Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte. The book's 174 pages describe 103 birding sites grouped into 15 clusters.

Users of the birding trail guides should be aware of what the books are not. They are not field guides, although there are many beautiful pictures of North Carolina's diverse bird life. They are not books that attempt to describe the presence, abundance or general location of specific bird species, *Birds of the Carolinas* does a wonderful job of that. They are not "Lane Guides" that describe to the cluster of trees where to find certain birds or what to expect on a given outing at a given location, John Fussell's *A Birder's Guide to Coastal North Carolina* and Marcus Simpson's *Birds of the Blue Ridge Mountains* do that job admirably well. Instead, the NCBT books provide users with an easy reference guide to birding sites in the state, and arranges them in such away that a birder can easily plan a day, weekend, or longer trip visiting a series of sites that should provide good viewing opportunities.

At their simplest, birding trail guides may be a pamphlet or foldout that shows the location of sites and provides the briefest of detail. At the other end of the spectrum is something like the NCBT guides. The book, and it is a book, provides a wealth of information in a visually appealing, modern and professional layout. Birding sites are bunched into groups, with color-coded tabs designating each group in the book. Individual sites typically receive one page of space, although some merit a bit more. Each site write-up includes a locator map, the site's address, phone number, and website address (if any), and the name of the site's owner. A paragraph or two of text describes the site, and a sidebar includes information on species of special interest, habitats likely to be found, any special features of the site, access and parking, detailed directions to the site, and GPS coordinates, as well as the page of the DeLorme map on which the site is located.

Information preceding the site descriptions touches on safety tips, ethical considerations, local birding resources, and how to use the guide. A color-coded index allows users to quickly determine if fees are required, if boating access is available, and if hunting occurs seasonally at the site. Birders are also provided with eight "calling cards" that can be left at local businesses to raise awareness of the North Carolina Birding Trail and the economic impact of eco-tourism that results from publication and use of the guide.

In reviewing the guide I found very little to criticize, and it is obvious that a great deal of time and attention went into creating what is a very usable tool. Some of the bird species listed in the "species of interest" section may not be as easily found as implied (for example Black-billed Cuckoo is listed for Reynolda Gardens in Winston-Salem although the bird is found only rarely during migration), and the format necessarily only allows a brief description of where to bird once one arrives at a Birding Trail site, but these are small potatoes when one considers the wealth of information that is made available to birders at a quite reasonable cost. I think it should be safe to say that every birder interested in enjoying sites in the Piedmont will want this book!

For ordering information, visit www.ncbirdingtrail.org. Contact the University of North Carolina Press, http://uncpress.unc.edu, about resale options.

To Tape or Not to Tape...

Steve Shultz

Ten years ago birders interested in attracting birds via the use of an audio recording were faced with the need to, in many cases, manually create a cassette tape with the songs or calls of the target species and then lug a bulky tape recorder around with them. Accordingly, the use of tapes to attract species other than specific trip targets was not terribly common. One could meet many birders in the field before noting audio equipment in addition to the standard optical suite.

Now birders have easy access to digital recordings of bird songs and calls, and hundreds of song/call files can be carried on a lightweight digital audio player like an iPod©. This is both a blessing for birders and a potential curse for birds. Wheras before, birders most likely only had tapes of a few target species with them, todays "birdpods" can easily hold all the calls and songs of the standard North American aviafauna, plus the entire Beatles collection, with room to spare. This makes it possible to play the song of nearly any species desired within a few seconds. Accordingly, it is no longer rare to meet birders in the field with the capability to broadcast bird songs/calls at a moment's notice.

This ease of access requires that ethical birders be even more discerning than ever when faced with the option of playing a song/call to attract a desired species, or broadcast of a predator call such as an owl to attact whatever birdlife might be in the area. The sheer number of birders who are potentially playing "tapes" makes the possibility of failed nesting, "taped out", or stressed birds even more of an issue.

While the decision to "tape or not tape" is often a personal one with no right or wrong answer, various organizations and agencies provide guidelines, and in some cases rules, on whether or not birders, photographers, and others can or should utilize pre-recorded bird sounds. The American Birding Association's *Principles of Birding Ethics* notes: "Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area." Similarly, the North Carolina Birding Trail's *Respect the Resources* listing includes the following: "Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any rare species." The maker of one of the more popularly used software packages to catalogue bird recording, BirdJam, provides ten paragraphs of guidelines on their website at: www.birdjam.com/responsibility. Suggestions include limiting use of recordings to the minimum needed to attract the species of interest and discontinuing use of the recording once the bird initially responds.

In some locations the question of whether or not to make use of recordings is not an ethical one, it is a legal one, as the choice has already been made for visiting birders. Many Federal properties including national parks, national forests, national seashores, and other public lands specifically prohibit the use of recordings to attract birds. Most, if not all, Nature Conservancy properties such as the famed Ramsey Canyon and Patagonia-Sonoita Preserves in Arizona specifically disallow the use of recordings on their property. When birding in these areas, the choice is simple, leave the recordings in the car.

On a recent trip to southeastern Arizona I encountered two situations that exemplify the issue of improper taping. In the first, I came across a group of visiting birders at Sawmill Canyon loudly broadcasting the call of a Greater Pewee. In addition to being illegal in the national forest area and U.S. military base in which Sawmill lies, the birders were not more than twenty feet from a sign specifically prohibiting the use of recordings. In such a heavily visited area as Sawmill, not only were these birders practicing bad birding ethcis, they were breaking the law.

Later during the same trip I was comparing notes with a pair of birders who were making use of a well-known local birding guide to show them birds on their target list. They mentioned seeing Whiskered and Western Screech-Owls, which become somewhat more difficult to find during this particular time of year. When I inquired about where the owls were found, I was dismayed to hear that the birds were seen after being "taped in" at a campground in Madera

(Continued on page 7)

5 Things You Can Do To Help Birds

It is 2009, and like many others you may have participated in the tradition of creating New Year's Resolutions. This year why not consider including a resolution (or two, or three!) that will help those feathered aviators that we enjoy so much. Here are, in no particular order, five things that you can do to help birds and other wildlife in 2009.

1) Buy a "duck stamp". Purchase of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps provides much needed dollars to purchase land for the National Wildlife Refuge program. 98% of the monies raised from the sale of the stamps goes to purchase land.
2) Recruit a minority birder. The United States continues to become more enriched by becoming more diverse, but how often do you see birders from what are traditionally considered minority groups? The answer is probably "not often enough". Meeting future conservation goals requires input from all Americans, and introducing someone to the wonders of nature may open the door to a lifetime of conservation awareness.
3) Support non-profit organizations that endeavour to purchase/lease land for conservation purposes. Purchase and protection of critical habitat can help ensure future generations have someplace where they can go to view the birds we enjoy today.
4) Support businesses that support conservation efforts. As an example, the CBC contracts with Grass Roots Press, an environmentally-focused business, to print the Newsletter and Chat.
5) Consider wildlife-friendly plantings when making your landscaping decisions. Creating bird-friendly habitat is a wonderful way to see first hand the impact of you efforts on local wildlife.

Birding Tapes (continued)

Canyon, a location that is not only very heavily birded, but also specifically disallows the use of recordings. For a birding guide to practice such questionably ethical, and in this case illegal, birding was disturbing.

In cases where the birder is accurately assessing the likelihood of significant disturbance and putting the well-being of the local aviafauna at the forefront, the ethical use of recordings can provide an important tool to the field birder. In some cases, use of recordings may actually minimize disturbance. Imagine a birder seeking a Black Rail in a remote wetland. It is not breeding season, and the location does not attract a large number of birders. Using a tape to locate and attract the rail may be less disturbing than trudging through the marsh and flattening vegetation. Similarly, a birder staying on a trail and calling a bird into view may create less of an impact than wandering off trail and trampling vegetation in an effort to silently approach a target bird.

The availability of MP3 players, iPods©, and other digital media players means more birders than ever have the chance to learn bird song and use targeted selection to view birds. Attacting a migrating breeding-plumaged spring warbler might produce that "magical moment" for a new birder who will go on to enjoy a life-long hobby.

The ability to carry bird recording for all likely local species is a powerful tool, and to copy a line from a recent superhero movie, "with great power comes great responsibility." I encourage all to consider where you stand on the issue of recordings, review the ethics guidelines proferred by conservation organizations, but most of all, enjoy birds, birding, and nature!

Welcome New Members!

Duncan Fraser
Zebulon, NC

Alisha Hayes
Hiddenite, NC

Julien McCarthy
Judith Pate
Brown Summit, NC

Paul and Laura O'Brien
Bath, NC

Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Park
Scotland Neck, NC

Maureen and Joe Tansey
Whispering Pines, NC

Patty Tice
Raleigh, NC

Jack Webb
Charleston, SC

James Whitaker
Salem, SC

Deceased Member

Robin Carter

Lynne Mattocks Lucas

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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Clemson, SC May 1-3
Hickory, NC September 25-27

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